

Use Somebody by [linoleumground](#)

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Summary:

Use Somebody is a longfic about the fanon that Mya (milfbyers) and I have worked on for approximately 2 months now. It is the basis of all my other Stranger Things fics. It is the story of four closeted gay teens in 1960s Hawkins, Indiana who find comfort in each other. In their friendships, old and new, in their relationships, clear or not, and in the family they have created. This is The Rolling Stoners Fanon, laid out for anyone who wants to learn to see. It is the thing that brings me the most joy, that I am most proud of, and I can't wait to share it with you all.

1. Bauman

Author's Note:

tw for q and d slurs

His brain was tuned out as much as possible. He had gotten very good at shutting out the world when necessary. The school could be so loud and overwhelming, but a name kept ringing through no matter how hard he tried to ignore it. Typically because it was followed by physical contact.

“Bauman!”

He felt as if he was the first person in history whose own last name terrified him. A hand made contact with his shoulder and he knew what came next. The sharp jab knocked the stack of newspapers out of his arms. Two hands made contact with his shoulder blades and he felt his chest ram up against the cold brick walls. The hands held him there, and one lifted up to connect with the right side of his head. The left side connected with the wall.

“Are you deaf Bauman?” the voice echoed in his head for a while before he could muster a weak response.

“No, Don,”

“Then why don’t you answer when I call you?”

Murray stayed silent. He didn’t answer because he hoped for once they’d move on. They never did. He had become an object of violent affection for some of the other guys in his grade. Maybe it was how weak he came across. He was lanky, not too short, but shorter than them, and definitely much lighter. Maybe it was the fact that he spent his time writing articles no one read, or the way he fidgeted when he felt unsafe. The nicknames could describe it best. Geek, spaz, loser. The worst ones, though, the ones that always stung just a little more, were crazy and queer. He wasn’t a queer. He’d admit to being certifiably insane before he ever even dreamed of calling himself gay. It hurt nonetheless.

“You guys never do anything new,”

A new voice came through, it was deep and calming, and it made Murray feel like he had just swallowed melted butter. The pressure against Murray’s back and head was gone and oxygen was circulating a little more freely through his lungs. He didn’t dare move from the

position he was in, and his face continued to rest against the bricks.

"Every day you pick on the same guy, in the same way, shake things up a little, go push Newby into a dumpster or something for a change,"

"Newby's no fun, he's got this weird confidence, it's harder to break him,"

Don's hand wrapped around the back of Murray's shirt as he pulled him off the wall and into a loose chokehold.

"The queer gives us so much more to work with,"

Murray didn't bother to try and escape the chokehold for fear it would tighten. He never could fight back. He knew he was too weak, that he'd never win and only end up more hurt than necessary. He just wasn't a fighter.

However, he did lift his eyes, if only for a moment, to those of the softer boy. Softer only described his demeanor towards Murray, physically he was more alike to a small giant. He had to be almost twice Murray's weight, and although he was a mere few inches taller, it still felt as though he loomed over anyone he stood next to.

"Just let him go, Don, I think you've done enough damage,"

Don reluctantly released Murray from his grasp. He stood up slowly but kept his eyes glued to the floor, waiting for them to leave.

"Go ahead to the cafeteria I'll meet you in a second,"

The boy ran a hand through his hair as Don stalked off to wait with the rest of his group. Once he was out of sight, Murray bent down to pick up the papers he was handing out prior to the attack, most of which had been mercilessly stepped on or kicked away. The hulking boy crouched down and started picking up the papers too.

"You don't have to help me Jim, I know how to pick up paper,"

Murray avoided eye contact, he couldn't let Jim know that he liked the idea of him staying, he didn't know if he could actually be trusted or if he was just looking for ammunition to give his friends.

"I know that I just,"

Jim paused.

"I'm sorry about him, I don't know why they're so focused on you,"

Murray scoffed.

"You don't know why? You clearly haven't heard-"

Murray stopped abruptly, it was as if his brain shut down for a fraction of a second, all because Jim's hand brushed against his as they reached for newspapers. Jim seemed completely unphased, picking up the last paper and handing his small stack to a frozen

Murray.

“Bauman?”

That name. The sound of it coming from his mouth was enough to snap Murray out of his trance. He snatched the papers Jim had collected out of his hands and muttered a thank you before standing up as quickly as possible. Practically sprinting in the opposite direction of the cafeteria, he left Hopper crouching and confused.

Murray sped through the crowded halls, bumping past a few people on the way to his locker. He didn't bother handing out any more papers, no one took them anyways. He finally arrived at his locker and crouched down to unlock it. His heart was beating faster than it ever had before, partially because he just borderline ran through the halls, the other part because of the brief interaction between him and Jim Hopper. He could still feel the slightest pressure on his shaking hands as he crammed the newspapers into his locker. He put one hand on top of the door to steady himself as he pressed his head against the cool metal frame.

Murray finally closed his locker and stood up, he felt as though someone was staring. Then again he always felt that way, but when he turned around, he locked eyes with a short girl. Her hair was cropped and black, which, coincidentally, matched her entire outfit. She was staring at Murray as if she was planning something. He knew who she was, Joyce Horowitz. She wasn't popular, but she seemed to have some standing at school, he really didn't see why, she was just as much an outcast as he was. Maybe because she was a girl, or maybe because beneath all her angst she really was pretty. He felt as though he had been staring for too long, but then again so had she. Joyce was the first to break eye contact, and she stalked away down the hall as if the encounter had never happened. Murray watched her leave with a feeling of stress and confusion welling in the pit of his stomach.

The cafeteria was so loud all the voices amassed into one echoing cacophony rattling around Murray's skull. He made his way through the line with unfocused eyes and drifted over to his usual seat so mindlessly he barely noticed the stares burning into him from Jim's table. When his vision came into focus again he could see a few of the guys standing up out of the corner of his eye and he prepared to

have his face smashed into his food or have a drink poured on top of him. As the burning feeling of embarrassment reached his neck, a book bag was swung onto the table in front of him. He jumped at the sudden bang and lifted his head to see Joyce falling casually into the seat across from him. The boys stopped in their tracks.

"I have a question," she paused for a moment as if she was coming up with it on the spot. "About the school paper,"

Murray stared at her blankly. If he had ever spoken to Joyce Horowitz before in his life he certainly did not remember it. They only knew each other vaguely through their parents going to the same synagogue.

"Okay?" He continued to fix his gaze on her face as she thought. He was waiting for a question he was quite certain she still did not have ready. A few moments of awkward silence passed. It felt like the cafeteria had gone quiet and all was still except for the odd duo. Finally, Joyce opened her mouth to speak.

"I want to submit a poem," she seemed content with her final decision.

"That's not a question," Murray responded flatly. He didn't like being made fun of, and he couldn't see why she'd be talking to him if not to mock him. At least Jim's friends were upfront about it. He found pretending to be nice incredibly distasteful. Joyce rolled her eyes.

"Okay, let me rephrase then, can I submit a poem?" Murray let some air out of his nose.

"Yeah," his responses were kept short, more words meant more to use against him.

Joyce drummed her hands against the table while they sat in silence. He caught her eyes flicking for just a fraction of a second to the boys who seemed to be waiting for her to leave. Murray suddenly understood what she was doing.

"Do you want to show me?" he asked. Joyce looked at him confused.

"The poem. Do you want to show me the poem? Make sure it's appropriate and all,"

Joyce's eyes went wide with understanding.

"Oh yeah! Uh, it's in my locker, we can go after you finish eating," she said with a slight smile.

"No we can go now, I'm not really hungry anyway,"

Before she could even respond Murray was already on his feet and walking past the group that had been waiting to pounce on him. Joyce quickly gathered her bag and chased after him to catch up. She

tried to keep up with his walking pace, but it was a bit difficult.

"Hey, Gumby, relax. We're not all able to cross the school in a single stride,"

The lanky boy said nothing but slowed his pace just a bit so she wasn't working overtime to keep up.

"So what's the poem about?" Murray asked as they got to Joyce's locker. She put in her locker combination and wrestled the door open. Her locker was in a state of disarray. Notebooks were missing covers and loose papers covered in poor handwriting that may or may not have been notes for some class, Murray couldn't tell, littered the shelves.

"It's, uh, a love poem, sorta," she replied as she fished around the mess. Her hand emerged with a journal grasped between her slender fingers. Murray cocked an eyebrow and scoffed.

"A love poem? Really? Who about?"

"No one, in particular, just a love poem," Joyce replied, but her face flushed so red Murray knew there was not one word of truth falling from her mouth.

"Alright, well. Let me see it then," he said and held out his hand. Joyce flipped through the pages frantically and lingered briefly at a poem before shaking her head and flipping through some more.

"Any day now, Horowitz..."

Joyce shot him a look of annoyance. She couldn't remember why she decided to help this guy. They'd never spoken before. He never did anything to help her; he never even so much as glanced in her general direction. At least, not to her knowledge.

"Okay. Here. This one." Joyce stopped flipping and held the book out to Murray, tapping the page with the poem in question. Murray took the book in his outstretched hand and brought it closer, staring at the page intently. The words were surrounded by small doodles, and although they weren't really directly related to the poem, he felt as though somehow they helped the experience. His eyes scanned each phrase as Joyce bit at the skin on her lip. She was bouncing on the balls of her feet clearly nervous for Murray's review. He didn't understand why she would care about his opinion, she didn't even know him.

"This is really good," and he wasn't just saying that. She really was a phenomenal writer and he found himself shocked at how attached he felt to the poem. Joyce stopped fidgeting, her eyes sparkled lightly.

"It is?"

Murray tore his eyes from the paper and raised his head to meet Joyce's gaze.

"Yeah, it's genuinely really good. I was expecting something... generic, no offense, but, I never really. Feel this way reading love poems this is... it's good, Horowitz,"

A small smile spread across the small girl's face as she took the journal back from Murray.

"I'll publish it," he said. There was a brief moment of silence between them, but it didn't feel as awkward as it perhaps should have. "Uh, just come by Mr. Brooks's classroom tomorrow after school, that's when I work on the paper,"

Joyce grinned as she closed the journal and shoved it back into the clutter. The school bell rang out through the halls as the hallways filled with the people coming out of the cafeteria.

"I'll be there, Bauman!" Joyce shouted over the growing roar of student life. Murray nodded curtly before turning to go. "Where do you think you're going?" Her voice suddenly sounded like the only thing ringing through the crowd. He turned back to her slowly.

"Uh... to my locker?"

Joyce held up her finger. "Just hold on a second Flash Gordon, let me grab my stuff I'll go with you,"

"Oh, you don't have to do that,"

"I know that, Bauman. I know more than anyone that I don't have to do anything, I want to do this, you dingus,"

Murray couldn't break eye contact with the side of Joyce's face as she grabbed her science textbook and forced her locker shut. They began walking to Murray's locker together. Don and his lackeys were crowded around, not waiting for Murray, however. He just had the fortunate chance of having a locker directly below the person who hated him most in the world. Murray groaned and stopped in the middle of the hallway.

"What's wrong?" Joyce asked as her gaze followed Murray to the group of boys. "Oh... oh who cares, it's your locker just go!" she whisper-shouted as she leaned into him.

"God, I wish it was that easy Joyce, but I guess I'd rather live to see tomorrow,"

Luckily none of them seemed to have caught sight of him and they walked off without a second glance, except Jim, who looked back so briefly at Murray he thought he might have hallucinated it. Joyce confirmed his suspicions, however.

"Why'd Hopper look at you?" she questioned with a grimace as they finally arrived at his locker.

"He looked at me?" Murray feigned ignorance even though he could feel his ears burning, and he was quite sure if his curly hair wasn't getting so long, that Joyce would've noticed as well.

"Yeah, Jim and his goons were stalking off all manly-like and I swear he looked directly at you, are you two friends?"

Murray shook his head as he crouched down to open his locker, leading to several crumpled newspapers falling at his feet. "Friends? God, no. I didn't even notice. He was probably looking at something near us,"

Joyce shrugged and scoffed. "Whatever you say, dude,"

After freeing his science textbook from his much more organized cubicle and shutting the door he stood up.

"We're in the same science class?"

Joyce looked genuinely shocked.

"Do you pay attention to any of your surroundings ever?" he joked as they walked side by side. They fell so naturally in step together you'd think they had been friends their entire lives.

"I'm sorry, I don't typically look around for the quietest person in existence when I walk into a room,"

Murray let out a light laugh. He felt for the first time in a very long time, possibly in his whole life, that he had a friend. He just hoped it would last past that day.

The rest of the day passed in a blur. Joyce had realization after realization that Murray was in fact in most of her classes and Murray questioned if she had serious issues with her vision as they were halfway through the year. His evening was also a blur. The usual, him and his mother sitting in uncomfortable silence as they ate, a few outbursts at all the things Murray was doing wrong in his life, and eventually laying in bed with his eyes open worrying about everything imaginable before exhaustion consumed his bones and he simply passed out.

The following day was just as uneventful as every other day in his life, he was forced to assume Joyce only spent the day with him out of pity, to protect him from assholes temporarily. He saw her talking to some people in the halls, he spotted her on the way to her classes and sneaking out during math to presumably go smoke. She didn't

acknowledge him, and though they had only spent a day together it still hurt to see her move so carelessly through life as if they had never interacted. As if nothing had changed. Last period came and went and Murray's whole chest felt heavy with a sort of sadness he didn't understand.

The door to Mr. Brooks's class practically slammed open causing Murray to jump very aggressively. Inside the door frame stood Joyce with her backpack in one hand and her journal in the other.

"Poem time!" she shouted as she walked into the room, shutting the door with her foot behind her. She walked up to Murray and plopped down next to him as if nothing was wrong. Murray focused on the layout of the paper he was organizing. "I was starting to think you didn't want me here," she continued. Murray scoffed.

"You didn't talk to me all day, I was starting to think you didn't want to be here," he shot back. Joyce looked at him, unsure if he was genuinely upset.

"You didn't talk to me either, Bauman, you just kinda watched me, like a creep,"

Murray was silent. "So you finally notice my presence?"

Joyce rolled her eyes and nudged his shoulder with hers. "Yeah, when people stare at you all day you tend to notice,"

"So why didn't you say anything to me?"

"Why didn't you say anything to me?"

They sat in silence. Never awkward. Never uncomfortable.

"Alright let's get this poem in the paper" Murray stated formally as he stretched out his legs in front of him. Joyce slipped a sheet of paper where she had rewritten and redrawn the contents of her journal page. Murray aligned it with one of the pages as Joyce looked over his shoulder at the different entries. She scrunched up her face as her eyes fell upon a photo of the cheerleading team.

"Ugh, they really have to be on the same page as me?"

Murray laughed lightly.

"They're having tryouts, pretty sure Beth got pregnant or broke her ankle, maybe both,"

Joyce cackled at the comment. Her head was thrown back in laughter and Murray raised his head to look at her side profile. He had become quite fond of it. The way the corner of her eye crinkled, the shape of her nose, she was really quite beautiful, and if he wasn't the way he was he was sure he'd be in love with her. Maybe he could be,

somehow.

"I just can't stand that Dawson bitch and all her little friends,"

Murray raised his eyebrows.

"Such animosity, Horowitz, what did she ever do to you?"

"Her and all her cronies call me a dyke constantly,"

Murray froze.

"Are you?" he asked, hands hovering over the page. Joyce scoffed and shook her head.

"God no, they just can't fathom anyone not being as prim and proper as they are, I'm not... that. I'm not." her shoulders had slumped from their usual upright position as she stared at the desk in front of her.

"I believe you, don't worry," Murray said with a slightly comforting smile. Joyce met his eyes and smiled back.

"Thanks,"

They finally finished the layout, or more so, Murray finished the layout while Joyce badmouthed Karen Dawson the whole time. Murray put the layout away in a locked cabinet to print the following week. The school paper was a weekly ordeal, daily would be too much of a hassle. The hallways were lit only by fluorescent lights as they exited the classroom. The sun set early at this time of year and even though it was only six in the afternoon there was barely any light left outside.

"Do you have a ride home?" Joyce asked as their footsteps echoed through the empty halls.

"No, I was just gonna walk like I usually do,"

"Oh, bullshit, it's freezing. I'm giving you a ride,"

"You don't have-"

"Yeah, yeah, I don't have to. Why do you always say that? I don't hang out with you because I feel obligated to, Murray, I hang out with you because as much as you try to get me not to, I like you. You're more fun than people think, so just, let me be your friend okay? Come up to me and talk to me in the hallway. I'll do the same. Ask me for lifts so you don't have to walk home in the dark or in the cold. That's what friends do, I think. That's what I want to do for you,"

They walked on in silence, Murray staring at the ground, Joyce's hands in her coat pockets, her eyes flicking between Murray and the hall ahead. They opened the doors to the front of the school and the cold wind smacked against their faces, almost waking them up from whatever trance of quiet they were in.

“You’re gonna regret this, Horowitz,”

Joyce grinned, looking more beautiful and happy than ever before.

“I don’t think I will, Bauman,”

It didn’t make him shudder when she said it. It didn’t make him feel weak. It made him feel warm. It made him feel like he was home.

Bauman.

He could get used to it.

2. Preacher's Daughter, Principal's Son

Summary for the Chapter:

An introduction to the other half of The Rolling Stoners. A look into the lives of Jim Hopper and Karen Dawson.

“Jim? Are you listening to me?”

“Hm? Oh, yeah, I am,”

He was not.

Karen groaned and kicked lightly at his foot. “Oh yeah? What did I just say?”

Jim snapped back to reality and faced his friend. “Something about... cheerleading?”

Karen rolled her eyes and leaned against the stair banisters leading up to the church doors. “Lucky guess, I was trying to say that I hope that Bauman freak doesn’t hide my photo away in some random page of the paper. I need people to see it, we’re in dire need. Beth was part of the base of our pyramid we can’t practice until she’s replaced,”

Jim sighed. The two were waiting somewhat impatiently. Mass had ended a half-hour ago, and even though they were going to see each other at dinner anyways, their parents never failed to talk endlessly.

“I’m sure your team will be fine Karen, every girl on the planet is scrambling to join,”

Karen gave a slight smile. “Yeah, no, you’re right, I just get so stressed out by this stuff. You know, as captain, everyone blames me when something goes wrong. I just want everything to be perfect,”

Jim nodded. There was always subtext. Karen had been his friend since they were 4 years old. He knew this wasn’t just about cheerleading. They never spoke directly to each other, they monitored their vocabulary and phrasing, every voice inflection, every whispered word. It wasn’t so much that they couldn’t trust each other, except that was exactly it. There were some things you just couldn’t talk about, even to your closest friend, when you had families like theirs.

A hand clapped Jim’s shoulder.

“Alright, you kids can continue your conversation at dinner, we have to get home now,”

Karen smiled at Jim's dad, a man as large as his four sons. Frank Hopper was not a great father. He was too stern, rather unforgiving, he picked favourites, and his love, if you could even call it that, had to be earned, it was conditional.

"I'll see you later Karen,"

Jim followed his father to the car with his younger sister and their mother. His three brothers got into the car next to theirs. They were a big family and couldn't just take one vehicle to go anywhere. Karen watched them drive off as the last of the visitors spilled out of the church. She fiddled with the cross on the chain around her neck in silence until her parents and sister finally shut the church doors and walked down the steps to her.

"Don't lean against the banister, it's not ladylike, or hygienic for that matter."

Karen stood up straight at her mother's words and followed her family silently towards their car.

"That was a very powerful sermon today father,"

Beverly Dawson was Karen's younger sister. Her parents seemed to believe she was the walking image of perfection, an angel on Earth. She was also a grade-A kiss-ass.

"Thank you, Bev dear, I'm glad you understood the message,"

A side glance was shot in Karen's direction.

Karen's whole life felt like a routine, a neverending walk across eggshells while she attempted to gain half the praise from her parents that her sister got, but the worst day was Sunday. Sunday in the home of a preacher was the most routine day. Putting on the face of the perfect children who would someday be perfect wives and perfect mothers, like their own mom. It seemed to come naturally to the rest of the family, but for some reason, Karen had to try twice as hard around them. Everyone else was fooled by her overcompensation. She was known as the goodie two shoes Catholic girl at school, but to her family, she was never good enough. This is why she and Jim Hopper got along so well.

"Do you need help with that mom?"

Jim's family was hosting the dinner this week, and his mother was struggling to move the crockpot from its spot on the counter. His mother smiled and stepped back from the pot raising her hands in mock defeat.

"The perks of having such strong sons right?" she gave Jim a soft

smile as she watched him transport the large container full of beef stew. Whereas the Hopper's father was cold and distant, Meredith Hopper was the picture of a good mother. As soft with her boys as she was with her one daughter, and although she also picked favourites, she never let it show even for a moment. The downside to her timid and caring nature came with being married to a man like Frank. She did not have a voice in her own home. Sometimes Jim caught glimpses of a frown or the world's most subtle eye roll when his father said or did something she didn't agree with, but she could never let him see that.

Meredith gave Jim a small side hug "my hero," she whispered softly before moving on to continue her preparations. He watched her move around the kitchen for a little while longer. Karen's family's perfection caused insecurity in any household they visited, even that of their oldest friends, and he knew better than to get in the way of their attempt to meet their expectations.

"I'm gonna go study for a bit before dinner, big test tomorrow, call for me if you need anything, okay?"

She turned to him with eyes full of adoration. "Okay, dear, don't get too distracted," she turned back to her meal.

Jim climbed the stairs. The bottom faced the dining room and you could have a fairly clear view of the entire room from the top of the steps. His father always complained that it was a stupid way to build a house and that he could've done better. Meredith's dad built the house for them after they got married.

"Head out of your book, Ev," Hopper said as he dodged around his sister, tapping the top of her head playfully. She had a habit of pacing in the upstairs hallway when she was studying, said it helped her focus. She swatted lightly at his arm in rebuttal.

"Head out of your ass, Jim," she responded. He loved it when she got feisty and couldn't help but grin despite the insult.

"Not so loud, dad'll hear you," his tone was playful, but Evelyn knew better, his words were as serious as ever. She gave a nod of understanding.

"Excited to see your girlfriend tonight?" she lowered her book and followed Jim into his room like a lapdog. Jim shut the door behind him, he only really closed his door for two reasons. To sleep, and to talk to Evelyn.

"She's not my girlfriend Ev, you know that already,"

"Well she sure acts like your girlfriend" she started making kissing

noises and dramatically spun around the room. "Oh big quarterback man, please hold my books for me, walk me to class Jimmy baby, oh please pick me up in the middle of the night to go make out,"

Jim rolled his eyes, Ev was smart for her age, book-wise, but she could be naïve at times when it came to real-world issues. She was in her last stretch of middle school and was going to be a freshman while Jim was a senior in the coming year at Hawkins High School.

"It's not like that, Ev, we've been friends since we were in diapers, we're just good friends,"

Ev stopped her theatrics. "You should tell her that, don't want her to get the wrong idea," she sat cross-legged on the chair situated in front of Jim's desk, which was so covered in knick-knacks and garbage that it wasn't much good for actually doing work at.

"She's aware, Ev. Weren't you studying? Why are you here?"

Evelyn shrugged. Jim sighed. "Are you nervous about tonight?"

Her eyes fell to the rug, she just shrugged again.

"You have to stop comparing yourself to Karen, and especially not to Beverly,"

"But they're so... perky, and good and perfect and pretty and they know all the rules and manners that girls are supposed to know, but no one told me I guess... cause I make stupid mistakes like using the wrong fork at dinner and then Bev snickers to her mom and their perfect hair doesn't even shake from their laughter cause it's solidified into place or something and-"

"Evelyn stop. You aren't like them and that's fine. You're perfect. Do you think I know which forks to use? I absolutely do not. I just watch mom. Just watch mom, okay? Rock-solid hair and good manners don't make a good woman, they don't make a good anything. You are good. inside and out. That's what makes you a good person, got it?"

A small smile crept across her face. Jim always knew how to make her feel better.

"Got it."

"Great, now go study so I can study, you're distracting me," he couldn't help but grin while saying it.

Evelyn hopped off the chair and picked her book up off the pile of trash on his desk. She opened his door and turned back to him before leaving.

"Thank you, Jim,"

He smiled at her as he sat down on his bed, textbook in hand.

"Anytime."

"Karen are you ready? We're all waiting on you," Bev's incessant knocking always made Karen want to pluck her eyebrows off while she slept.

"I'm coming, Bev, I was just trying to find my earrings," Bev groaned. Karen waited a few moments until she could hear her sister's footsteps retreating. She stared at herself in her vanity mirror. Her dark hair was in loose curls, they were tighter that morning but she had a habit of pulling on them when she was bored, and she had spent half the day in church. Her mom always said she would've been prettier if she was blonde. Her sister had gotten the blonde hair from their dad, the blonde hair, and the height, and the bone structure, but Karen got her mom's Italian genes. Thick dark hair all over. She secured her clip-on earrings and took in a final shaky breath, standing up. Her steps seemed to echo as she walked out of her room and over to the rest of her family, all fixated on her.

"All that time and you're going like this?" her mother turned to open the door as her father took out his keys. "Well, I suppose it's too late to do anything about it now..."

Karen's eyes dropped, her shoulders slouched, she followed the three of them at a distance. It didn't have to be physical, although in this case, it was, there was always this two or so feet of distance between her and her family.

The car ride was mostly silent. Beverly made a crack about how she spent all that time getting pretty for Jim. There were brief moments where Bev was a little sister. When she stole Karen's clothes or asked her for help with homework. Sometimes Karen thought maybe she wasn't so bad, but then her parents praised her and she got that look on her face and she treated Karen like she didn't belong in her own home. That's when she was reminded that Bev was just as much against her as everyone else in that house of God.

Meredith opened the door with a big grin and ushered in the Dawsons. The table was set, all eleven seats crammed around it. The children ate in silence, the adults exchanged their pleasantries. Talked about the food and the community and church and work, whatever mundane things they could come up with. When the meal was finished the women got up to clear the table, Jim sat across from the rest of the men in silence as they spoke about football. They couldn't even include him in a conversation about a sport he played. Evelyn leaned back against the counter as the four older women

cleaned. She watched them as if she was trying to memorize every movement they made. Karen's mom looked back at her.

"Don't lean, it's not ladylike,"

Evelyn quickly stood up straight and focused on smoothing out her skirt. She didn't see her mom furrowing her brow or hear her whisper to the uptight woman.

"She's just a kid, Lorianne,"

Karen's mom let out a small sigh.

"Well... I suppose..."

Ev lifted her head again only to meet Karen's gaze. She had paused her scrubbing and was holding the plate in one yellow-gloved hand and a sponge in the other. All the women were wearing these large yellow rubber gloves. Ev thought they looked awfully silly. She continued to look at Karen, trying to decipher what her reason was for staring at her. Finally, she spoke.

"Hey, my arm is getting tired, you wanna come help me finish off these dishes?"

Ev was caught off guard, she was never invited to help clean up, everyone always told her she didn't know how to do it properly, she grew accustomed to just staying out of the way. Her face lit up a little as she walked over to Karen shyly. She put on Karen's yellow gloves and got to scrubbing as Karen whispered pointers to her. She stood next to Ev with her arms crossed, looking down at the dishes, and the faintest smile on her face.

When everything was cleaned, with minimal remarks from Lorianne and Beverly. Karen reached down and squeezed Ev's damp hand. When Ev looked up at her she got the same feeling as when she looked at her mother. Like there was a halo shining around her, and no one in the room could be as wonderful.

The adults dismissed the younger group as they went to the living room to talk about whatever it is they were always talking about. The kids retreated upstairs, Jim's two older brothers went to their room in silence, his younger brother was leaning against the wall trying to impress Beverly by talking about how heavy the things he could lift were. Ev pulled Jim away for a second before retreating to her room.

"If Karen was your girlfriend... I'd be okay with that," she said with a smile.

Jim forced a small smile back as she walked away and went back to his own room, Karen was already sitting at the foot of his bed. He

shut the door.

"How do they always have stuff to talk about?" he joked as he sat at the other end of his bed.

"I know, it's ridiculous, they don't even do anything, do they just share cooking secrets and laundry detergents and then spend 12 hours talking about... sports, or something,"

Jim let out a light laugh. They sat in silence for a moment, Karen glancing back at him a few times over. He continued to look straight forward, leaning forward with his elbows on his thighs, and his hands clasped. She scooted closer, he didn't even seem to notice. Suddenly her hand was on his thigh and she was leaning towards him. Jim felt his face get hot, he instinctively pulled away.

"Woah what- what are you doing there Dawson?" he laughed awkwardly. Karen's neck began to turn red.

"Oh... oh that was so stupid... oh man I'm sorry..." she stood up and tugged down her skirt before crossing her arms over her chest. She began pacing. "It's just... isn't this how it should be? We have all the makings of this... this picture-perfect romance, right? We're childhood best friends! And we get along, like *really* get along, not just tolerating each other, and you're like- the most important person in my life."

She stopped pacing for a moment, her shoulders began to shake, and before she could stop it tears were streaming down her face. She wiped at her nose with the back of her hand.

"You're the quarterback... and I'm head cheerleader, we're right out of a movie Jim!" she let out a sob masked by a throaty laugh. "All we need is to be in love..." her eyes finally met Jim's for the first time since she started her ramblings. "Why aren't we in love?"

Jim stood up and walked over to her, placing his hands gently on her shoulders. "I don't- I don't know Karen... are you in love with me?"

Karen shook her head, tears still dripping down her cheeks. "No I- I don't think I am,"

Jim pulled her into his arms and held her tightly. "Me neither..."

They stood there together in silence for what felt like a very long time. Karen spoke again, voice muffled as her face pressed into Jim's chest.

"Why aren't we in love?"

Notes for the Chapter:

as always this is dedicated to mya, my other half, and the co-creator of this wonderful fanon. i love you.

i know it takes me a really long time to put out new chapters (neurodivergency and school be like) but i truly love this fic and love writing it and plan on completing it fully over time and i thank you guys for being patient with me! hope you guys like this new chapter <3

3. Somewhere Only We Know

Summary for the Chapter:

Joyce and Murray spend some months together. Joyce decides to take him to a special place where they have the first serious talk of their friendship.

Murray was standing in the same spot as he was the week before. He fidgeted with the corners of a newspaper and glanced nervously around the hall. The classes would start emptying soon.

“Hey, what’s got your panties in a bunch Bauman?” Joyce nudged his elbow with her own. She was holding her own stack of papers. Despite her comment Murray could tell she was equally as nervous as he was, if not more so. He assumed she was worried about how the public would take her poem. Luckily for her a grand total of about seven people even read the paper and two were standing side by side wedged between some lockers and a garbage can.

The bell rang. Murray barely had time to process the sound before a drove of eager high school girls made a beeline right towards their pathetic little corner. Joyce’s stack ran out in a matter of minutes and only a few remained in Murray’s grasp by the time the crowd had settled. His eyes slowly moved down to meet those of his partner. Joyce cracked a smile of disbelief and let out a small laugh.

“I guess people got really into the news overnight,” she said as she looked back at the mass of students. Her eyes moved through the faces, resting on the side profile of one girl, her long dark hair tied into a tight ponytail. Her straight-across bangs were in dire need of a trim, every time she blinked her eyelashes would hit them. The sun lit up her skin, not as pale as her own, and her smile sent a jolt of something through Joyce’s chest. The girl glanced over at them.

“Bauman!”

Murray’s eyes shot up as quickly as Joyce’s shot down. The girl made her way through the crowd, abandoning the other girls she had been talking to. She held a copy of the paper in her hand.

“Hey, um, I just wanted to say thanks, for publishing the...” she glanced over at Joyce, or more specifically at the top of Joyce’s head, since her eyes were currently burning holes into the toes of her combat boots.

"No problem," Murray said before she could finish her sentence. "It's what the school paper is for after all... cheerleading advertisements," he tried to cover the sarcasm in his voice enough to avoid angering her. Karen Dawson was not known for having a temper, but he sure didn't want to be the person who found out if she did, she'd probably sic one of the thirty football players who wanted to get in her pants on him. Karen gave a small smile and threw one more glance in Joyce's direction before retreating back to the group of girls she had earlier abandoned.

Joyce lifted her head back up, luckily her hair was long enough to cover her cheeks which were burning red.

"You really do hate her don't you? Wouldn't even look at her..." Murray commented as he slumped against the wall, his eyes unconsciously scanning the face of each person who walked past. Joyce would answer him, but she felt if she opened her mouth she'd throw up all over her shoes and his. The lanky boy could tell something was off, he didn't pry, he didn't think they were close enough for prying yet. "Let's go get ready for class, alright?" he pushed himself back upright and cautiously put his hand on her shoulder. Joyce was eager to take the distraction and nodded quickly. The two walked in the direction of their lockers, exchanging no words.

When Joyce Horowitz first threw her book bag on the cafeteria table in an attempt to save Murray from embarrassment in late October the last thing he expected was to make a friend. He had managed to get through most of elementary school, all of middle school, and half of high school without needing anyone, or really wanting anyone in his life for that matter. It was December 18th, the last day of school before winter break, and Joyce and Murray had been spending quite a bit of time together in the last two months. They hung out often after school, usually at Joyce's place as her parents rarely seemed to be around, and when they were they rarely seemed to care what Joyce was up to. They never really talked about it, just like how they never talked about it when Joyce would come pick him up and hear the world's loudest screaming matches before he would come outside. They ate lunch together and she was essentially officially a part of the school paper now. Murray always called her the creative director and she would always make a joke about he didn't need to give her a pity title. They talked a lot, yet frequently managed to say nothing at

all, nothing of importance at least. One time Joyce asked about his mom. He said it was nothing, she was just a little strict is all, don't worry about it. So she didn't, at least not vocally. They loved to complain to each other about menial things. It seemed like they always understood exactly why the other was annoyed. Murray complained a lot about the football players, although they tended to leave him alone a little bit more now, probably due to Joyce. He complained about the other people who worked on the paper never carrying their weight, and homework. Normal things. Joyce complained about Karen a lot. Seemed like she was always on her mind to some capacity. He was fairly sure if Karen Dawson breathed in a way that annoyed his friend he would hear about it for days to come.

Joyce was waiting by his locker. She was fiddling with her car keys, leaning back against the metal doors. Murray paused for a moment and examined her from a distance. She was wearing a large flannel she had actually gotten from him. He told her he thought he looked like he was trying too hard to be cool when he wore it, so she asked if she could have it. He said yes, and of course she looked effortlessly cooler. Her jeans were ripping at the knee with age and her boots were scuffed from use. Every once in a while he would pause and take her in. He was always a little in awe that someone who looked so cool would ever bother being friends with him. He was very glad that was the case. Sometimes she'd do something like lean her head on his shoulder while they watched a movie or shove him playfully and he'd be reminded that they were friends, like it kept having to sink in over and over. Finally he walked over to her, his sudden appearance startling Joyce.

"Hey, Bauman, I was wondering if you were ever gonna make it," she smiled and shoved herself off the lockers, stepping aside to let him access his. Her jacket was draped over her arm and her book bag had been placed at her feet, now shoved haphazardly out of the way. She began to put her coat on as Murray went about his business. "Hey, you're not busy or anything are you?"

"Yeah, I'm actually all booked up for Christmas,"

Joyce rolled her eyes, she was pretty sure if Murray even mentioned Christmas in his house it would trigger a fight.

"Ok, *Bauman*," she put emphasis on his last name, jokingly reminding him of his Jewish roots. He cracked a small smile.

"No, Joyce, I'm not busy, surprisingly I have not been invited to any

parties as of late, why?”

Joyce grinned and nudged his crouched leg making him lose balance a bit.

“I wanna take you somewhere,”

Murray placed his fingertips on the floor in an attempt to regain his composure before looking up in fake shock, “are we going on our very first date Joyce Horowitz?”

Joyce matched his shocked expression, “first? What have we been doing for the last 2 months? Are we not going steady? Speaking of, where’s my promise ring?” her shocked expression had turned into a grin as Murray stood up and slammed the locker shut with his foot, pulling on his jacket.

“I told you I’m not giving you any ring until you put out, Horowitz, now where are you taking me?”

Joyce did her best to throw an arm around Murray’s shoulders despite their height difference. “You’ll see”.

Murray bothered Joyce with guesses about where they were going the whole drive there. He came up with about 4 different names for brothel and she was at her limit when she finally parked her car in what seemed like the middle of nowhere.

“Oh my God, you’re gonna murder me, I should’ve known,”

Joyce rolled her eyes as she opened the car door, heading for the trunk. She popped it open and pulled out a large fleece blanket and a six-pack of beer. Murray had gotten out of the car and joined her, offering to carry something. She handed him the beers. He didn’t question how she always seemed to have easy access to alcohol despite being underage. At the end of the day it meant he got to be a little rebellious, so why bother asking?

Joyce took off walking towards a wooded area not too far off from where she had parked, Murray had no trouble keeping pace. They entered the woods and walked for what Murray felt was a ridiculous amount of time before an arm shot out in front of him. He had been watching the ground to make sure he didn’t slip or trip, and when he lifted his head he felt his breathing stop. It looked like something out of one of those Christmas cards he was always seeing in the shops. The river was iced over, definitely not enough to stand on, but iced over nonetheless. The snow on the ground was mostly undisturbed and the bare branches of the trees were weighed down by icicles and heavy build-ups of snow. Joyce was looking at him looking at the

view.

"Pretty, right?" she said as she used her foot to clear a fallen log of as much snow as she could remove before throwing the blanket over it. Murray stepped clumsily over to the log and sat on it, stretching his legs out in front of him and putting the six-pack in his lap. Joyce sat next to him and held out a hand. Murray freed a beer and handed it to her before taking one for himself. They weren't really beer people but it sure was easier to transport cans over glass bottles.

"It's really nice, Joyce, but I mean, why did you bring me here,"

Joyce shrugged, "mostly because I like you, and I trust you, which maybe I shouldn't, I don't know, 2 months isn't a long time, but..." she paused and took a sip of her beer, "I've known some people my whole life who I wouldn't even trust to do a group project with, so I'm thinking maybe time isn't everything... or whatever,"

Murray took a swig from his can and tried to avoid making a face of disgust, unsuccessfully. "Well, I'm glad you do... trust me, that is. And I'm glad you brought me here."

"I've never told anyone about this place. I found it a little while ago, my car broke down right over on that street I parked on, and I don't know. I couldn't call anyone, no cars were stopping, so I just started walking into the woods, just because. Maybe a part of me was hoping I could just. Keep walking on forever. But I found this place, and I stayed here for a bit. And it was like everything in my life stopped for a while. No stress, no fear, just an hour of sitting here and listening to the river. You can't listen to it winter, but we'll come back when it thaws over I guess,"

Murray's eyes fixated on the frozen lake while Joyce continued to drink from her can. "I think I love you," he said, gripping his can tighter. Joyce froze.

"Uh... huh?"

He shook his head, "not like. *Love* love. I'm not in love with you, I don't think. Or maybe I am. I don't know, but I don't think so. I just. I don't think I've ever loved anyone, in any capacity, ever, and so it's just a little confusing. When you laugh it feels like. The perfect fall day, when every step crunches some leaves and it's not freezing, like you probably don't need to put on a jacket, but you have to wear a sweater. When I make you smile it feels like I'm fulfilling a purpose and when you make me smile I feel like. Oh, this is it. This is what people have been writing poems about for 8,000 years. And I tried to see if it was that kind of love. I laid in bed imagining a wedding day

or something like that, and it didn't do anything. It didn't feel like I needed anything more. Whatever we have is just enough, it's the perfect amount of whatever it is. Love, I guess. And I love you, more than I've loved anything in my life, just not like that,"

He hadn't meant to ramble so much, but Joyce was staring at him with tears welling in her eyes. She had already finished her first beer, she was better at holding them down than he was. She didn't know what to say. No one had ever said something like that to her before and she didn't have to think for more than a few seconds before coming to the conclusion that she felt the same way. She let out a small laugh. "Do you think there's such a thing as soulmates? Soulmates who aren't supposed to get married?" she paused for a moment as Murray looked over at her finally. Looking into his eyes properly for the first time in two months she grinned, the biggest smile she had ever let take over her face. "I think that's what we are," Murray smiled back and looked away when the eye contact became too much, finishing off his beer slowly. Joyce scooted over to him, leaning her head against his arm. They stared at the Christmas card scene in front of them for a while. Murray's back was against an upright tree and eventually his head was leaned back against it.

Joyce woke up first. She hadn't realized they had fallen asleep, she didn't think it was possible in this cold. Her nose was stinging as she lifted her head from its spot against Murray, her neck sore. She picked up Murray's wrist and tried to see the time. It had to be fairly late, only the moonlight spilling in through the cracks in the trees lit them up. Once her eyes had adjusted she saw the hands ticking not far past the 10 o' clock mark. She shook Murray who only groaned in response. She shook him again harder and he startled awake. He looked around in a slight panic before remembering where he was and who he was with.

"Shit, Horowitz, what time is it?" he said, his voice heavy with sleep. "About a quarter past 10 according to your watch," she replied as she stretched out her legs, one of which had fallen asleep in its awkward position. Murray breathed a sigh of relief.

"Alright, could be worse, has been worse," he slowly pushed himself up off the log with frozen hands. He bent down to pick up the beer cans once he was able to see again. Joyce stayed sitting and staring at him. He looked back at her. "I love it here, but if I don't get home in the next 45 minutes I am going to use you as a human shield when

my mom pitches a fit,”

Joyce continued to stare at him, almost through him. She seemed lost in thought.

“Joyce?” He took a step towards her.

“Can I tell you something?”

Murray nodded, “yeah, of course,”

She took a deep breath, waiting a few moments, like she was silently gathering her courage. He waited.

“I think I’m...” her gaze finally seemed to focus. “I think I like girls, like, in the way that-” she paused again “in the way the boys are supposed to like girls. I think I’m a queer or a lesbian or whatever it’s called,”

Murray froze, staring at her. He didn’t know what to say. That was frowned-upon, wasn’t it? He should be disgusted, he should run far away from her. At least, that’s what he’d been taught his whole life. That if you felt that way you were an abomination, and if you knew someone who felt that way you should avoid them at all costs. He didn’t feel disgusted, but he felt something in his gut, this ache of stress. Like her admitting this deeply affected him on some level, and he just couldn’t figure out why. Maybe subconsciously he knew. Joyce searched his face for a reaction, worried that she had just scared off her only real friend.

“Murray...”

He snapped out of his haze of thoughts.

“That’s... fine,” he said. A strange response, but better than nothing.

“Do you hate me?” she asked.

“God, no, no Joyce I could never hate you, not over this, or anything for that matter,” his answer spilled out before he could even think of it properly. He didn’t hate her, regardless of her condition, or whatever it was. He genuinely couldn’t hate her.

A wave of relief washed over Joyce, like the weight of the world had been hoisted from her shoulders and dropped off somewhere she’d never have to see it again. She stood up and walked over to Murray. He was standing awkwardly, shifting his weight from one foot to another, he stopped when Joyce was facing him. She wrapped her arms around him and buried her face in him. Tears were rolling down her cheeks. He gently placed his arms around her.

“Thank you,” Her voice was muffled against his chest.

“Of course.” he held her tightly, making sure she was the first to let go. She quickly wiped her tears away with the sleeve of her coat

before turning to grab the blanket.

The walk back to the car was silent, as was the whole drive home. When Murray got out of the car at his place he turned back for a moment. He looked at Joyce then turned his head to his house before looking back at her. She smiled at him. He took a shaky breath.

“Me too,”

They stared at each other, he hadn’t planned this. He wasn’t even sure if it was true, he hadn’t really come to terms with it yet, but something about Joyce, about the river, about everything she was and everything she did for him, made him want to tell her. She was confused at first.

“You too... what?” she asked.

He didn’t want to say it out loud. Like saying it out loud made it more true than saying it in his head.

“I’m also...” he gestured his hands towards her awkwardly, hoping that would be enough, and it was.

“Oh... *oh*,” Joyce smiled softly “Oh. That’s... fine.” She said. He returned her smile. They stayed that way for a moment, until the porch light of Murray’s house flicked on. He turned to go so quickly they didn’t even say goodbye. He disappeared into his house. Joyce drove off before the screaming began.

She drove home with the windows down, the cold making her eyes water, but she felt they would have watered on their own regardless. It was an overwhelming night. Sharing her deepest secret, to someone who apparently felt the same way. Not just anyone, though. Her soulmate.

Notes for the Chapter:

sorry it always takes me forever to update this i just have not much motivation B). anyways! i enjoyed writing this chapter because i adore joyray so hopefully you enjoy it too. and as always thank you to mya and all other supporters of my writing and of me in general <3.

4. Mom

Summary for the Chapter:

A look into the home of Murray and Dorothy Bauman

Murray shut the door and locked it quietly behind him, glancing momentarily out of the frosted window to make sure Joyce had pulled away. He knew by the light leaking down the stairs that his mother was already awake, but that didn't stop him from moving slowly and silently. He always had the secret hope that if he pretended to be invisible nobody could bother him, he could move through life peacefully. It didn't work at school, and it certainly didn't work at home. When he finally got to the top of the stairs his mom was leaning on her shoulder against the doorframe of her bedroom. He didn't get the chance to speak.

"Am I unfair to you?" She didn't move from her spot. Murray was frozen in place. "I said, am I unfair to you?"

Murray thought for the briefest moment, yes, but god forbid he say that to her face. He mustered up his courage "no, mom," he suppressed the urge to roll his eyes. His mother pushed herself off the doorframe, her arms crossed. She was shorter than Murray, by about a foot. She was even shorter than Joyce. Her height didn't matter at all in her intimidation, she didn't even have to touch Murray to terrify him.

"That's what I'm telling myself too. I'm fair. I give you a late curfew. 10:30. Most parents only let their kids out until 9 o' clock, but I tell myself, I say, Dorothy, your son has a good head on his shoulders. If he's going out he's certainly not causing any problems. It used to be like that. You would go out on late night walks and you'd be home by 10:30 on the dot at the very latest. Never an excuse. Never home late. And then that... that *girl* shows up in your life and you come home past midnight."

"It's 11, mom,"

"Oh don't do that, don't act like you don't know what I mean, not tonight, but other nights, you've come home at one, two in the morning? Sometimes you don't come home until the next morning and I only find out you're staying over in the middle of the night.

Which, don't even get me started on you staying over at a girl's house. How I let you do that when most would never even dream of allowing it. And I let these things slide, because you-" she paused, like she was choking back tears. One of her infamous war tactics. "You didn't have a lot of friends growing up, and I was happy to see you interacting with someone, anyone, and a seemingly nice, Jewish girl too. But ever since she came into the picture it's been constant disrespect. I don't know how things work at The Horowitz House, if she spits on her parents every day or what, but here there are rules. There always has been. I don't want to get a phone call one day saying they found your body in a gutter because you were out drinking-" Murray was about to interject but he saw his mother raise her finger, preemptively stopping him. "-Or doing whatever it is you do with her at 2 in the morning, and some schmucks took advantage of you, or she crashed her car, or god knows what else. I ask so little of you-"

Bullshit.

"-the least you can do is what I ask. Be home by 10:30, not 2 am, not midnight, not 11. 10:30."

Murray didn't enjoy eye contact, he had been focusing his gaze to the left of Ms. Bauman's head, hoping the mostly dark hallway would save him from a confrontation based around the disrespect that was avoiding her eyes. "I'm sorry, mom, really, we just lost track of time, we fell asleep,"

Dorothy narrowed her eyes. "You fell asleep? Where? After doing what?",

Murray instantly regretted saying it, he often tried to tell her the truth, thinking maybe he would avoid getting yelled at, but it usually angered her more, even if the truth wasn't anything terrible. He had gotten quite good at lying due to this. If he lied and got caught it was almost as bad as being honest, but if he lied and got away with it he got to avoid the screaming matches all together. "We were just talking, hanging out in her car, and it was warm, what with the heating, and we were tired from school so we just... fell asleep,"

His mom scoffed. "In her car?" she finally uncrossed her arms and put her head in her hands for a moment before regaining her composure. "What, are you two... at this age? I mean I know times are changing, but really Murray?"

Murray shook his head and held in a sigh. If he showed any sign of annoyance it'd set her off. "No, mom, I'm not... we're not doing

anything like that! We're just friends and I- I know how you feel about the whole, out of wedlock, I'm not-"

Murray frequently didn't realize the increase of volume when they spoke, or argued, until his mom pointed it out.

"Don't yell at me!" she yelled. He shut his mouth quickly. She put her hand to her forehead, like she used to do to him when he was a child and she would check his temperature. "I am doing my best to be a good mom to you!"

Liar.

"You know it's not easy raising you by myself. Your dad had the right idea, when he realized you were a weird little child he left. I only wish I had beat him to it!"

Murray bit his tongue and did his best to breathe through the lump in his throat. His mom knew exactly what she was doing. She knew the things that got to him, she was trying to provoke him to talk back so she could slam him completely and come out on top looking like the mature adult between them. Part of him wanted to do it, for the satisfaction, but he knew if he did the fight would go on for even longer, and he'd get grounded. He really didn't need that over winter break. He had plans with Joyce.

"I'm sorry." He forced out his false apology. His mother could tell she wasn't getting a rise out of him tonight and simply shook her head before retreating to her room, slamming the door shut. He saw the light go out from the crack beneath her door, and only when he heard the creak of her climbing into bed did he walk past her door and into his room. He once again shut the door as quietly as possible, sure not to trigger another outburst. He didn't bother changing out of his clothes, he just took off his pants, still a bit wet and cold from sitting on a snow covered log, and crawled into his bed. He cried silently into his pillow until he felt there was no more fluid in his body and slowly drifted off to sleep.

He woke up the next morning to his mom gently shaking him awake, the smell of breakfast food in his nose. He looked up at his smiling mother and forced a small smile back. She wasn't so bad, he thought, not always. He kept telling himself that. It kept him sane.

Notes for the Chapter:

this is a short one! just a little establishing chapter, but it didn't take 5 months to write so that's exciting.

thank you always to mya and all the rolling stoners
supporters. i hope you enjoy!

5. Audrey Hepburn

Summary for the Chapter:

Murray and Joyce's plans are suddenly changed when an unexpected ally joins their ranks.

Joyce and Murray were standing at the counter of the town's diner waiting for their order. Some old Audrey Hepburn movie was on the TV guide and Murray insisted the two pick up their food and watch it at Joyce's house. She found his love for movies sweet. He pretended to be some huge intellectual when it came to film, but most of his favourites were the silly romcoms and musicals that distracted one from everyday problems.

"I just can't believe you haven't seen *My Fair Lady*. My mom took me to the theatre to see it when it came out. I was, what? 15?"

Joyce laughed "Every 15 year old boys dream. To go see an Audrey Hepburn musical in theatres with his mother,"

Murray kicked her ankle gently, "shut up, like you were any better at age 15. What were you doing, huh?"

"I don't know, normal 15 year old things, picking up smoking, being cool,"

Murray scoffed "oh, bullshit!"

The middle-aged cashier shot them a look. The two quickly looked in the other direction, towards the door, suppressing their laughter. The bell above the door rang and in came a small group of teenage girls. They all seemed to be laughing and enjoying themselves, except one. With her dark hair in her signature ponytail and her bangs curled. She looked ready to go to a cheer meet. Although that couldn't possibly be the case as it was Saturday, and winter break. Her coat was buttoned up all the way as opposed to her friends, who were wearing them open. Joyce turned her head back to the poorly placed letters on the menu above them. Murray glanced at her sideways before returning his gaze to the girls. They hadn't seemed to notice them yet, except Karen, who had just met Murray's gaze. He didn't react, but she gave him a gentle smile, almost like she was worried one of the other girls might notice. He resisted the urge to roll his eyes, keeping his blank stare. Karen's face fell. If Joyce hated her, he hated her, that's how their friendship worked. The others finally

seemed to acknowledge their existence. One of them leaned over to her friend and whispered something while looking directly at Murray. They both laughed. He couldn't stop his face from flushing with embarrassment and quickly faced away along with Joyce to avoid being caught. Of course this only egged them on.

"Date night, is it?" one of the girls called after them. Neither responded. They just kept their eyes fixated on that stupid menu. Why was the food taking so long?

They continued to speak loudly, on purpose, amongst each other.

"Isn't the world amazing? There's really someone out there for everyone. Even two freaks can find love,"

"Love? The way they are, the best they can hope for is someone who'll tolerate them,"

The girls laughed some more.

"I think it's so brave of them to go out in public together. I'd rather be shot dead than be seen with either of them,"

"Oh, definitely. I'm getting secondhand embarrassment just looking at them,"

Murray thought to himself that, if they weren't girls, he would have hit them by now.

"If my kid was a psycho loner I'd have left him to,"

Murray shut his eyes and pressed his palms into the counter. When Joyce turned around, she could see the smug look on the last commentator's face. She knew she had gotten to him. Murray reached over and lightly touched Joyce's arm. He just wanted to get their food and leave. Finally the cashier, who had seemed to be taking her sweet time, handed them a paper bag of food and two cups. Murray grabbed the food, Joyce grabbed the cups, and the two turned to leave. Unfortunately they had to pass through the group to get out, and they most certainly weren't moving. Murray pushed past as carefully as he could. He heard it as quickly as Joyce did, and he knew he wouldn't have time to react. The same girl who had made the comment about his dad muttered a word to Joyce under her breath. Murray had heard it flung as an insult before, but never to Joyce, and especially not after hearing her revelation. He turned around just in time to watch Joyce open the lid off her milkshake. He reached out to stop her but she had already thrown the contents all over her perpetrator, and a few of the surrounding girls before dropping the empty cup on the floor.

"Maybe one day you insufferable whores will find better ways to

amuse yourself,”

She shoved past everyone, including Murray, still holding his drink. Murray stared at the milkshake-covered girls for a moment, they stared back at him in shock, as if they expected him to do something about it. He smiled slightly before turning and leaving, catching up to his friend in the parking lot.

“Hey! Joyce!” He placed a hand on her shoulder. She finally stopped her speed walking, turning to face him. She had tears in her eyes.

“I’m sorry. I know you don’t like the attention, I just. They wouldn’t stop and- God I can’t fucking stand them Murray I just-”

He pulled Joyce into a hug.

“Hey, hey, don’t apologize. I’d be lying if I said I disapproved. You did the right thing, okay? Fighting back is better than staying quiet... sometimes,”

Joyce wrapped the arm that wasn’t holding his cup around him.

“Thanks, Bauman,”

He finally released her and they walked back to the car together. As Joyce unlocked her door they heard the faint sound of the bell within the diner. They both looked up, expecting the girls to come storming out, ready for a confrontation. Instead, Karen was standing just outside the door staring at them.

“Oh my God it’s like a scene from a horror movie, get in the car before she floats over here and beheads us,” Murray opened the passenger side door and ducked in. Joyce opened her door as well, but she just stood there.

Karen’s hands were shoved into her coat pockets. The light snowfall caught in her hair. She opened her mouth to speak and closed it again. Murray looked up at Joyce, who couldn’t remove her eyes from Karen. She finally spoke.

“I’m sorry!” she called from across the parking lot. Joyce’s face remained blank.

“For what!” she called back.

Karen looked down at her boots.

“I don’t-” she started softly. “I don’t know!”

Joyce scoffed, she began to turn towards her car again.

“No! Wait!” Karen took a step towards them. “I’m sorry my friends are so terrible to you! I’m sorry everyone is so terrible to you! I’m sorry I’ve been terrible to you! Either directly or not! I’m sorry I did- I’m sorry I did whatever I did that made you hate me! I don’t hate you Joyce Horowitz! I never have!”

Silence fell over the three. It felt like a half hour had passed before Joyce spoke.

“Do you want to come watch My Fair Lady!”

Murray shot a look at her that she only vaguely acknowledged with a withering side glance.

Karen looked like she didn’t believe her.

“I’m sorry, what!”

Joyce groaned.

“Can you come over here!”

Karen took a second to register before rushing over, hands still in her pocket, her ponytail bouncing with every stride. She and Joyce were now less than a foot away from each other.

“I said do you wanna come watch My Fair Lady? With us?”

Murray lightly banged his head repeatedly against the dashboard.

Karen glanced down at him.

“Are you sure that’s a good idea?”

Joyce waved her hand dismissively.

“Ignore him, he’s just being dramatic... so. Are you in?”

Karen beamed.

“Sure,”

She opened the car door and climbed into the back seat just behind Joyce. She looked over at Murray, who was now staring wistfully out the window. Joyce got into the driver’s seat and began pulling out of the parking. She took a hand off the wheel and smacked Murray’s chest.

“Will you quit being such a fucking baby?”

Murray let out a sigh and turned in his seat to face Karen, resting his hands on the backrest and his chin on his hands.

“Do you like Audrey Hepburn?”

Karen smiled and nodded. Murray’s eyes lit up.

“I already like you better than Joyce,” He turned back around in his seat, his demeanour much less exasperating. Joyce rolled her eyes as they sped down the road.

The night went surprisingly smooth. Murray expected more... animosity between the two girls. What with the whole silent rivalry thing they seemed to have going, as one-sided as it might seem. Joyce liked the movie which of course made Murray happy, and he got to gush about Hepburn with Karen, who was much funnier than he expected. Although she did tend to cringe whenever the two used

the lord's name in vain, or when they cussed every two sentences. When they looked at the clock and saw it was past midnight, Karen gasped.

"Oh my! I have to get home. It's way past my curfew"

Murray looked at Joyce and raised his eyebrows.

"We could drive you home..."

Karen sucked in air through her teeth before holding her lips tight together. She seemed to be mulling it over. How else did she expect to get home?

"Could you... could you drop me off a bit down the street from my house... it's not that I'm embarrassed or anything... it's just that my parents think I'm hanging out with the cheer girls. And you guys are not them... also Murray is a boy,"

Joyce snorted. Murray glared at her.

"Fuck off, I am,"

Joyce shrugged

"Yeah we can drop you off, just don't get kidnapped or anything alright?"

Karen smiled softly at her

"I promise I won't get kidnapped, Joyce,"

Murray could've sworn he caught her swooning at Karen's smile.

The pair dropped Karen off a few houses down from her own, but they sat and waited to make sure she made it in. It was 12:30 in the morning, luckily Murray had already told his mom he was staying over at Joyce's. He turned in his passenger side seat and placed a hand on Joyce's shoulder.

"What the fuck was that?"

Joyce let out a laugh.

"God, don't ask me. It feels surreal,"

"I can't believe we just hung out with Karen Fucking Dawson, and it wasn't excruciatingly boring. Like goody-two-shoes Dawson. Preacher's daughter captain of the cheer team Karen God damn Dawson,"

Joyce shook her head in disbelief

"I don't even know why I hated her,"

Murray grinned.

"I know why, it's pretty obvious,"

Joyce glanced at him.

"What?"

Murray let out a small laugh.

"It's like what they say about boys pulling girls pigtails because they like them. You're crushing on her, Horowitz"

Joyce's face flushed red.

"I am absolutely fucking not! Are you insane? You just said it yourself, she's the preacher's daughter. If she ever caught wind that we were... my God she'd probably report us to the church elders,"

Murray laughed again.

"You're ridiculous. You are in unbelievable denial. Just because she's not... doesn't mean that you can't have a big fat crush on her and her bouncy shiny hair and her bouncy less shiny boo-"

Joyce punched Murray in his shoulder.

"Would you shut up! You're so insufferable oh my God,"

She put the car into drive and used a random driveway to turn around and head back to her house.

"Even if I had some stupid schoolgirl crush on her literally nothing could happen so don't... don't fucking mention it around her ok,"

"I'm not an idiot, Horowitz, I'm not gonna tell the queen of Catholics something like that. Besides you're my best friend, your wants come before anyone else, myself included,"

Joyce rolled her eyes

"Fine. Ok."

They were silent most of the way home.

They didn't see much of Karen again after that night. Joyce said she may have been grounded. Murray said she probably got over her hanging out with nerds charity deal. Regardless school was starting up again and neither of them was looking forward to it much. The first day back they were already bombarded by assignments and pop quizzes on readings they were meant to do over break. Joyce had done them, Murray had gotten general recaps from Joyce. And by the time lunch rolled around they found themselves sitting at their table up against the window, avoided by most of the other students. They ate and talked about how annoying some people were and how the principal was a real ass, as well as most of the teachers. One of their favourite pastimes was just complaining to each other about things they found mutually aggravating. They reserved some time to talk about the paper as well which they'd have to start up again that week. In the middle of plans someone sat at the table, right next to Joyce. She felt her heart catch in her throat and Murray looked

around the cafeteria to see a few eyes on them. Karen smiled at him with a perfect toothy grin.

“Hey guys, what are we up to?”

Joyce and Murray looked at each other briefly, then back at her. Joyce was the first to break the awkward silence.

“Uh... newspaper stuff,”

Karen’s eyes lit up.

“Oh yeah! You guys run that thing don’t you? Any interesting news happening?”

Murray couldn’t stop staring at her in confusion. He spoke up.

“Listen, I’m not complaining, but um, why aren’t you sitting with your little... cheerleading group,”

Karen shrugged. She lowered her voice.

“You guys are a lot more interesting. Besides I got grounded for breaking curfew so I haven’t been able to talk to you since that night, I want you to know I wasn’t ignoring you or anything,”

Joyce kicked Murray under the table lightly. He knew it was meant to say ‘I told you so’. He hated when Joyce was right.

“Well then, alright... cool.”

He was still in a state of disbelief. Joyce finally answered her question.

“Bauman is more of the Breaking News guy. But nothing major has happened yet since school just started and all. I’m working on another poem for the writing section. Do you have anything to contribute?”

Karen shook her head.

“Oh, no. I’m not really the artsy or writing type, I’m better with athletics, and math. People say I’m a real math whiz,”

Murray widened his eyes.

“Miss Dawson! A math whiz? I would never have guessed.”

Karen smiled sheepishly and shrugged.

“Hidden talent I guess!”

Murray smiled. She was so genuinely happy just to be here, he couldn’t even find it in himself to be mean if he wanted to.

“So what are you like... planning on hanging out with us now?”

Karen looked back at the table full of cheerleaders shooting glances her way.

“I mean... I still have to spend time with my team and all and I’ve got cheer a few nights a week, but... if you guys would let me I’d spend as much time with you two as possible,”

Joyce's face flushed red and she blurted before she could even process the words she was saying.

"We'd love that!" she lowered her voice "I mean... no yeah that would be really great,"

Karen grinned and clapped her hands together.

"Oh! I'm so happy. And you know if ever you guys wanna come support me at games or... well I know you guys are um... not Catholic... but if you want to come to my church I think that would maybe... make my parents trust you guys more. Not that I don't! But they kinda care about who I traipse around town with I suppose,"

Murray took Joyce's hands in his and put on a mock debutante-style voice.

"You hear that, Joycie? Sports and Catholic Church! It's all we've ever dreamed of darling!"

Joyce yanked her hands away and rolled her eyes, but couldn't suppress her smile. Karen Dawson was going to be spending time with them. She actually liked them. She may not be in love with Joyce or anything, but just being liked by her was enough.

The end of lunch was signalled and the three packed up their things. Karen quickly jogged over to another cheerleader to talk about something, ponytails probably, while Joyce and Murray walked off to their lockers.

"Well isn't this the development,"

Murray bumped Joyce's shoulder with his bicep.

"I don't know what you're talking about," she responded as she opened her locker.

"Isn't it funny how we started the year with no friends and now we not only have each other, but also Karen Dawson, of Hawkins High School Cheerleading Squad fame?"

Joyce let a small smile play at her lips.

"Yeah, it is pretty funny."

Notes for the Chapter:

i am once again apologizing for taking so long to update but i have so much trouble with writer's block and motivation sorry <3 hope you guys enjoy this little chapter it's kind of filler for the next bit of the story but that's alright B) thank you to mya my co-creator and bee my love (something to wake up

to) and anyone who enjoys this silly little fanon and
my silly little fic

6. In This Shirt

Summary for the Chapter:

Joyce and Murray break laws and get into trouble that potentially gets them a new friend.

Joyce slammed her shoulder into the locker next to Murray's. She reached over and poked at his side.

"Guess what?"

Murray grabbed his coat and bag and shut his locker carefully.

"What?"

"You have to guess, stupid,"

Murray rolled his eyes.

"I don't know, give me a hint,"

Joyce smiled wryly.

"Mmmm it's. Not legal..."

Murray furrowed his brow.

"You finally snapped and killed someone?"

The two began to walk down the hall towards the exit. It was a school night but Murray convinced his mom to let him hang out at Joyce's under the guise of a really important project. Joyce bumped his thigh with her hip.

"No... but would you still be friends with me if I did?"

Murray shrugged.

"Probably, depends who you killed, and why, and how likely you are to get caught,"

Joyce nodded slowly as they approached her car.

"Good to know,"

She opened the driver's door and put the keys in the ignition. Murray dropped his bag at his feet on the passenger's side. Joyce began to drive, the second she was off the school premises she began to smile again. Her silly suspicious little grin. Murray knew nothing good could come of this, but that smile remained one of his favourite things in the world.

"Check the glovebox,"

Murray side-eyed Joyce and slowly opened the glove compartment, he spotted what she wanted him to see and quickly slammed it shut.

"Joyce,"

Joyce was in a fit of hysterics. He was wondering now if she already dipped into it.

"How did you even... why would you... oh my god..."

Between bursts of crying laughter she managed to reply.

"I know people, Murray, it's really not that hard to come by,"

Murray shook his head.

"Is it for us?"

Joyce nodded as she pulled into her driveway. Murray felt a smile creeping on his lips. He wasn't really a problem child. He may do some things his mom didn't approve of but he never really broke the law. This could be fun, though, and they were gonna be safe in Joyce's basement. It couldn't hurt.

Murray retrieved the weed and shoved it into the bottom of his bag. The two briefly greeted Joyce's parents as they were leaving for dinner, and retreated quickly to the basement. He dropped his bag on the dingy couch and shuffled around the bottom to find the bag once more. He pulled it up. Inside were two small nuggets of weed covered in seeds and leaves, he did not know if that was a lot or not. Joyce opened the drawer of the coffee table where she stored her rolling paper, usually used for her cigarettes. Murray always made fun of her for rolling her own cigs but it seemed to pay off today. Neither of them really knew how to prepare a joint. They kinda just crushed everything on the coffee table and sprinkled what seemed like a normal amount onto the paper. Joyce rolled it carefully, most likely incorrectly, she really only knew how to roll one kind of smoking stick. Murray fished his lighter out of his pocket as Joyce brought the makeshift joint to her lips. He flicked it open and lit it as he had done for her cigarettes many times before. She inhaled deeply and began hacking like crazy.

"Holy— shit!" her words were interjected by her coughs.

Murray laughed lightly at Joyce's reaction, even though he knew his would likely be the same. She took a second puff before passing it to her friend. He held it carefully, as if it would explode at any given moment, and took his own hit. He, too, began coughing an insane amount. It felt like his lungs were burning. He had only started smoking cigarettes since he started hanging out with Joyce, so he wasn't used to smoke the way she was, and if she was dying because of this, you could guarantee he was dying twice as much. Between gasps of air he spoke.

"Jesus Christ, Joyce, where the fuck did you get this?"

Joyce cackled.

"One of Jim's douchebag friends sells this shit,"

Murray raised his eyebrows.

"I'm both shocked and also not surprised at all."

He passed the joint back to her.

"I'm gonna go get some water," his voice was audibly straining against a cough. He pushed himself off the couch and walked slowly up the stairs, which made Joyce howl with laughter, which made him began cackling so hard he fell to his knees in the stairs, he grabbed the banister as he tumbled down a few steps, making both him and Joyce laugh harder.

"I'm gonna pee!" she shrieked, doubled over holding her stomach as the joint burned in her hand.

"Shut... the fuck up!" Murray wheezed, "You're wasting it!"

Joyce suddenly came to her senses and took another hit, Murray rushed up the stairs before she could distract him any longer. He wobbled towards the kitchen, at this point he knew her house layout better than his own. He opened the cupboard with the glasses and grabbed a plastic one, felt like the safer bet, before heading to the sink. He let the cold water run as he steadied himself on the counter. He didn't feel super inebriated but seeing as he had never been high before, and rarely been drunk, he felt more fucked up than he probably was. He finally made his way back downstairs and set his glass down on the coffee table. He had already drank half in an attempt to soothe his throat. Joyce had temporarily put out the joint on their ashtray. He picked it up and lit it once more before taking a few hits. It was beginning to go down a bit smoother, though he couldn't help but let a few coughs escape.

By the time the two of them had finished the joint between them they felt truly high. Murray's head was vibrating and it felt way too heavy when he turned to face Joyce.

"I can't believe you made me do this. You're such a bad influence,"

Joyce laughed.

"I didn't make you do anything, you wanted to do this. I never would've forced you,"

Murray smiled.

"Well if my mom finds out I'm claiming peer pressure."

Suddenly a wave of panic washed over him.

"Oh my God my mom's gonna find out."

Joyce groaned.

"Oh she is not going to find it dude,"

Murray shook his head

"No no... if I go home she's gonna smell it on me... she's not stupid she's

gonna-“

Joyce took his hand and hers. Her head flopped to face him finally. Their noses were practically touching.

“Do you want to stay over?”

Murray thought for a moment.

“I don’t have anything. I don’t have a change of clothes we have school tomorrow, I can’t show up in the same clothes,”

Joyce gave a confused smile.

“Why not?”

Murray couldn’t help but grin as his forehead touched hers.

“People are gonna think we hooked up. Walk of shame.”

Joyce began to laugh hysterically once more, her shrieking cackle couldn’t not be infectious. Murray found himself laughing so hard he couldn’t breathe. Both their eyes had closed, and it was the last thing either of them remembered before falling asleep. Apparently a common occurrence for them.

The two were woken up the next morning by the bustle of Joyce’s parents getting ready for work. It was very much like them to not even come check on the two at any point. Murray had fully enveloped Joyce in his arms, his chin rested on top of her head. She was curled in an almost fetal position, leaning into him. They were both wearing their clothes from the night before, although Joyce was drooling on Murray’s shirt. They shifted at almost the same time, releasing each other and stretching. Murray looked down at the circle of spit on his shirt.

“Ok, now I actually can’t wear the same clothes,”

Joyce looked at it and made a slightly embarrassed face.

“Ok. Yeah. I’ll uh. I can lend you a shirt.”

Murray raised an eyebrow.

“A woman’s shirt?”

Joyce rolled her eyes.

“No one’s going to be able to tell.”

The pair were standing at Murray’s locker as he pulled some books out. Joyce glanced past him before returning her vision to the floor.

“Incoming,”

Murray barely had time to turn around before Karen approached them, she leaned against the lockers on the opposite side of Joyce. If only his peers could see him now, surrounded by women.

“Hey!”

Karen flashed her beauty queen smile, with her perfect teeth. Joyce was practically entranced by their sparkle. All the things that used to annoy the two of them were now incredibly endearing. Joyce gave a soft smile back.

"Hey Dawson,"

Karen looked Murray up and down for a moment, he glanced at her with confusion.

"What?" his voice had a tinge of suspicion.

"Are you... um..."

Karen bit her lip, holding back a laugh. Her eyes met with Joyce's, and she knew they shared the knowledge.

Murray looked between the two exasperated.

"What? What's wrong?"

Karen let out a small snicker.

"Are you wearing a woman's shirt?"

Murray gasped and turned to Joyce, smacking her arm.

"You said nobody would notice!"

Joyce let out a similar snicker to Karen's

"Well, I'm sorry! I forgot we were friends with Miss America now."

Murray slammed his locker shut and pressed his forehead against the cold metal.

"I can't believe this. This is so embarrassing. If Karen knows all the girls know. And if the girls know they'll tell their stupid boyfriends,"

He pulled his head back and smacked his forehead lightly against the locker.

"This will be the death of me,"

Joyce rolled her eyes. He really was the king of dramatics, it was a shock he wasn't in theatre.

Karen picked at the paint on the locker next to her.

"I could get my friend to lend you one,"

Murray turned his head towards her, still leaning the side against the locker. Their eyes met.

"So... another woman's shirt?"

Karen let out a soft laugh.

"No, stupid, one of my guy friends,"

Murray's face scrunched.

"You have guy friends?"

Karen rolled her eyes.

"Well. I have two guy friends, and one of them is you,"

Joyce leaned forward to see Karen past Murray.

"Whose the other?"

Karen turned her back to the locker and leaned against it, crossing her arms, out of Joyce's sight once more.

"Jim."

Murray turned his face quickly away to hide the flushing. Joyce's jaw dropped into a sinister smile.

"Jim Hopper?", she inquired a little too pointedly.

Karen nodded.

"Oh my God, Murray, let's go get a shirt from Jim Hopper,"

Murray muttered under his breath so quietly only Joyce could hear.

"I am going to kill myself,"

Yet the trio made their way down the halls, Murray hiding his shirt with his books as best as he could until they arrived at their destination. Jim was rustling through his locker as though he had lost something. Karen half-skipped over poking him gently in the side before leaning her shoulder against the locker. Murray and Joyce's brows furrowed in unison, it was like they had crawled through a wormhole and were watching a straight version of themselves interacting. Jim had dropped what he was doing to turn and look down at Karen with the softest affection in his eyes. It was a little bit nauseating. Joyce felt her heart crack, just a bit.

"Hi Jimmy,"

Jim made a face at the nickname.

"Hey, Karen... what's up?"

He looked over her shoulder at the freak show of two behind her. Standing like they didn't know what to do with themselves.

"Do you... need something?"

Karen looked back at her... friends. As she spoke.

"Yeah, actually, I um..."

She turned back to Jim.

"Do you have a spare shirt? I know you usually keep one for emergencies and this is... well it's kind of an emergency."

Jim's thick eyebrows crunched to the centre of his face.

"Yeah, I have one, did..."

He looked back behind her, this time focusing on Murray. Their eyes met and Murray felt his stomach flip over. Jim shoved his hands in his pocket. They were sweating, for some reason.

"Did Bauman spill something?"

Murray felt his breath catch in his throat as he referred to him by name. Even if it was his last name. He felt like he was about to throw up all over Joyce's shoes.

Karen shrugged

"Yeah, kinda, I guess,"

Jim nodded and looked at the shirt crumpled at the base of his locker. He reached in to grab it and tossed it towards Murray, who freed one arm of his books to catch it. Jim gave a small grin.

"Nice catch. Maybe you could join the football team."

Murray scoffed, Jim's face fell. He was only half-joking, he didn't expect to be dismissed so clearly. Murray seemed to catch his mistake and fought with his brain trying to say something.

"Uh, thanks... for the shirt."

Jim's smile was restored.

"No problem, you can keep it."

Murray's heart fell into his ass. He felt like he was swallowing rocks.

"Okay! Well. I'm gonna change."

He turned quickly on his heels and headed to the bathroom at full speed. Joyce picked up her pace trying to catch up with him. He felt his heartbeat in his ears.

"Murray! Murray, would you slow down!"

Joyce finally caught up, working double time to stay next to him.

"What the hell was that?"

Murray shook his head.

"Nothing. He leant me his shirt. He was being nice because we're friends with his girlfriend."

Joyce scoffed.

"Have you considered that he's being nice because we are so charming that he, too, wants to be our friend?"

"Oh, don't be stupid," he spat, a little more cruelly than he meant to. He turned into the bathroom and Joyce followed behind him, a habit that had gotten them in trouble before, and would probably get them in trouble again. She hoisted herself up to sit on the counter the sinks were installed into. Murray dropped his books on her lap and locked himself in a stall.

"I'm not being stupid. If Karen Dawson is so eager to hang out with us, why is it such an unreal concept that Jim Hopper, her stupid beef hunk boyfriend, would also want to hang out with us?"

Murray tossed Joyce's shirt over the top of the stall.

"He's not stupid, he's not..."

Murray slipped into the shirt. It smelled faintly of what he assumed was Jim's cologne. It was a bit too big for him, they were similar heights but Jim definitely had more muscle mass. Murray was built more like a string bean.

"He's not like those guys he hangs out with. He's nice."

He tucked the shirt sloppily into his pants. Joyce let out a dry laugh from outside the stall.

"So why does the concept of him hanging out with us bother you so much?"

Murray shook his head as he slammed the door back open, yanking his books back from Joyce.

"It doesn't bother me, it's just not true. He doesn't want to hang out with us now will you let it go?"

Joyce raised her eyebrows as she hopped off the counter, grabbing her shirt back from the top of the stall door.

"Fine, I'm letting it go."

Murray opened the bathroom door, allowing her to step out first, he followed closely behind.

"You look nice in that shirt,"

Murray rolled his eyes, as they turned the corner quickly Murray felt his chest smack against another chest. He took a step back and was face to face with the principal.

"Where are you two coming from in such a hurry?"

He looked over Murray, his mussed up curly hair, his poorly tucked in shirt. He turned his gaze to Joyce, who always looked a bit like she got dressed in 15 seconds, and was currently holding a shirt.

"The men's room?"

Murray glanced over at Joyce. He clutched his books a little tighter. Joyce was staring directly at the toes of her boots.

"Will you two come with me?"

The two let out a groan as they followed him towards the office. Other students were glancing over at them and whispering to each other. Despicable smiles plastered on their faces. The bell rang and people started moving to class. Murray could catch some unsavoury words being spoken as people passed them by. Just more fodder for the stockpile of rumours about him and Joyce. Nothing new at this point. Principal Hopper glanced back at them as they walked.

"I think my son has that same shirt."

Murray and Joyce held back smiles as they continued down the hall.

Notes for the Chapter:

I know it takes 753 years for me to update I'm sorry society. But now that Stranger Things S4 has official

release dates I put my ass into gear! So here's chapter 6 of this incredibly self indulgent fic. Thank you to my sweet bestie Mya who created this entire fanon right alongside me and to my amazing girlfriend Bee who is probably my number one fan. Enjoy <3 see y'all in another 8 months probably.

Author's Note:

thank you so much to mya and everyone else who has added to this fanon or supported it from it's birth. you guys don't know how much this world we crafted means to me and it makes me so happy that you enjoy it. i love y'all and i hope you love this fanon as much as i do.